

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing re Governor's Proposed FY 2018-2019 Budget
Re: Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Budget
February 23, 2017

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM ACOSTA
Bridgeport, CT

Good evening Sen. Formica, Senator Osten, Rep. Walker and members of the committee. My name is William Acosta and I am from Bridgeport. I come before you today to address **Governor's Proposed FY 2018-2019 Budget.**

I would like to take just a moment to say “thank you” to you, the chairs and the members of this committee for all the hard work that you do day after day to do right by your constituents and the citizens of this state who represent so many varied interests and agenda. I am a proud voter and I plan to continue to be a proud voter.

I come before you today to address the proposed reductions in the state budget through this budget that cuts millions of dollars earmarked for mental health and substance abuse treatment and services for the fiscal year that begins in July of this year.

I serve as Housing and Advocacy Coordinator at Bridge House in Bridgeport. Bridge House is a nonprofit psychosocial rehabilitation day program—or more commonly known as a Clubhouse program—that serves adults, ***or clubhouse members***, living with mental health conditions. The cuts could very likely affect funding for *all* Clubhouse programs across our state.

I come to you not this evening in very large part not because of the title that I carry at Bridge House, but because of ***my own humble*** lived experience as the parent of an adult son who has had a lifelong mental health condition. The personal emotional pain that comes with witnessing loved ones in despair—and we can’t personally help them—is intense, to put it mildly. ***Not one*** of us is completely free of being at least relatively close to someone with a mental health condition and a story to tell. But for me and many others, that translates into a relentless energy to serve daily and make a difference in the life of someone who rely on the programming and services that these Clubhouse programs provide day after day.

Over the past 9 years, my son has very heavily relied on and benefitted from the employment, education, housing, involvement in local and state advocacy and becoming an active voter himself, young adult programming and socialization supports that Bridge House gives him *and over 200 active clubhouse members*. The reality is that I simply cannot imagine where my son would be or how he would survive were it not for the incredible support that he has received from Bridge House over the past 9 years. Day after day, Bridge House, numerous other clubhouse programs like it in our state, Regional Mental Health Boards and services like the CT Legal Rights Project provide assistance that honors the value, the integrity, the respect, the honor that so many of our people living with mental health conditions so sorely deserve, have earned and must receive every day.

I appeal to your conscience; to your vision; to your compassion, and I respectfully request that these proposed cuts in funding to Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services programs and services—be challenged and avoided. Thank you again, madam chair and members of the committee.